The Freedom of Living Generously

Written by Rev. Dona Johnson

Living and Giving
Stewardship Team,
North American
Lutheran Church

© 2020 The North American Lutheran Church. All rights reserved.
Permission is granted to reproduce pages for use by congregations as long as copyright information is retained.
CONTENTS

Introduction........................................................................................................3
Section I..................................................................................................................4
   An Old Testament Understanding of Giving and Generosity........4
   A New Testament Understanding of Giving and Generosity........6
Section II.............................................................................................................9
   Small Group / Large Group Interaction ................................................9
   1. What is Generosity? ..........................................................................10
   2. Changing the Culture of Giving....................................................12
   3. Engaging Others and Nurturing Relationships ..........................14
   4. Learn Your Story with Money ......................................................17
   5. Transformation ...............................................................................19
Section III ...........................................................................................................21
   Faith and Giving Commitment Sunday ........................................21
Appendix .............................................................................................................23
   A Portrait of Hope: A Legacy Letter to Loved Ones ...................23
   Visioning .................................................................................................24

The author, Rev. Dona Johnson, is chair of the Living and Giving Stewardship Team of the North American Lutheran Church. This study was written in collaboration with the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising at the Lilly School of Philanthropy, Indiana University.


Scripture quotations from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®) are copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. crossway.org

Some content is excerpted from material presented as part of the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving Seminar Executive Certificate of Religious Fundraising, Lilly School of Philanthropy, Indiana University, June 2019. Used by permission. philanthropy.iupui.edu/institutes/lake-institute/courses/religious-fundraising.html
INTRODUCTION

RESET is a highly interactive study that helps congregations reset and sharpen their vision of stewardship. It will test participants’ assumptions and misperceptions about giving. Participants will trace how their family of origin and their faith have shaped giving and generosity in their own lives. The study will also reset biblical understandings about Jesus, money and possessions, and assist congregations in resetting their priorities and faith practices — to shift giving and generosity from transactional to transformational.

RESET includes three sections:

Section I — An Old and New Testament Understanding of Giving and Generosity

Section II — Small- and Large-Group Discussions and Application Sessions

Section III — Faith and Giving Commitment Sunday

Venues in which RESET can be offered:

- Mission district convocations: Equip deans, pastors and leaders to lead RESET in their congregations.
- All-day seminar for congregations.
- Five-week Lenten midweek series.
- Five-week Bible study to accompany fall stewardship programs.

RESET focuses on learning through small-group engagement within a large-group gathering. In small groups, we learn from each other and the Holy Spirit works to enlighten and inform. Small groups encourage transparency and help participants build closer relationships with one another.

Section I provides a theological foundation. Before anyone can grasp in their fullness the meanings of the terms steward or stewardship, or, for that matter, what it means to be generous, they must first understand two basic truths. First, God in Christ Jesus is Creator and Owner of everything, and second, we own nothing — we are managers, the trustees of all that God has created and entrusted to us. We will further explore these two truths in Section I.

Section II provides a practicum to apply the theology learned in Section I. This practicum is highly interactive and provides members of your congregation or mission district the opportunity to reset your approach to stewardship and learn how to nurture generosity and giving in your community. Section II provides the lion’s share of the learning experience and is totally dependent on both small- and large-group participation. Invite your entire community to participate!

Section III outlines an annual stewardship program. This outline refers to the program “Stewards of God’s Influence.” This resource is available at thenalc.org/stewardship.

This study just skims the surface of the complexities that surround giving and generosity.

We each have been given the responsibility of growing in our own relationships with money. As we grow, we will be able to build cultures of generosity in our congregations. We will be clearer and calmer in our preaching, teaching and providing administrative leadership about finances.

This is what I want for you: that you will continue to explore your relationship with your resources, to live with a deep sense of gratitude, to know that in Jesus Christ you and I have enough and the possibilities are endless.

In the Appendix is a powerful exercise that you can do on your own time — A Portrait of Hope: A Legacy Letter to Loved Ones. You are asked to tell your story, your blessings and wounds, your passions and hopes and the legacy you would like to leave your family, church and community. This allows you to reveal to your loved ones how your faith played a role in your life and what you want to leave behind to help bring about change in the world. I encourage you to do this. You won’t regret it!

May each of us grow in wonder and amazement of what God has given us in this life. May each of us worry less and celebrate more the sovereign care and grace God lavishes on His children!

Rev. Dona Johnson, Chair Living and Giving Stewardship Team
An Old Testament Understanding of Giving and Generosity

God is Owner

The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

Psalm of David, Psalm 24:1 NIV

The God whom we call Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the Creator of all that we are and all that we have.

God is the Owner as explained in one simple truth: God created everything. God, who is uncreated, created the entire universe and all of creation. You and I only have what God has already created and given us. “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand” (1 Chronicles 29:14 NIV). Psalm 100:3 states, “Know that the Lord, He is God! It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture” (ESV). All that I think I own, I owe. The best thing about you and me is not what we are able to give, but what we’ve already received. God is the total owner of our lives and all the resources.

• God is creator.
• What God creates, God owns.
• Everything comes from God and belongs to God.
• God gifts the created world to His creatures (humans).
• God gifts humanity with an expectation that humans take care of and are responsible for the well-being of all creatures.

In the Old Testament, stewardship was not a religious term; it was a term associated with commerce. During ancient times, every business owner had a steward who was an overseer of the daily operations and affairs of the master of the house. In the Greco-Roman culture, a household unit (oikos) was not just a family dwelling but an estate, and included all those who worked on the estate — servants, slaves, teachers and craftsmen. And if a house church happened to meet in a house, the same management was extended to its members.

The Greek word for “stewardship,” oikonomia, is a combination of two words: oikos, which means “household,” and nomos, which means “ruler of the house.” The owner entrusted the steward, usually a slave, with the management of the household. The steward was given authority but was also under the authority of his master. The authority given the steward was never to be used for his own self-interests but for the good and prosperity of the whole household.

Thus, in Jesus’ day, there was a master who owned the resources and an appointed steward who managed the resources and was held accountable.

Our relationship with God is similar. If God is our Master, if God owns all things and distributes them at His will, then it is our responsibility as stewards to learn His desires, His vision and His values and manage His things accordingly. Jesus addresses this in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30.

We Are Managers

“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”

Genesis 1:26-28 NIV

You cannot understand stewardship or the role of a steward until you have a right understanding of Genesis 1:28. God is made known through His creatures. God’s command to subdue and have dominion (ra-dah) in verse 28 is in...
reference to animals. Dominance in this context doesn't imply exploitation or harshness; it simply means “being in charge of.” Like a shepherd who cares for, tends and secures the well-being of every creature and brings the promise of each to full fruition, we, too, are called to be in charge, to be responsible for and assist creation in reaching its full potential.

In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “this freedom to rule includes being bound to the creatures who are ruled… [they] constitute the world in which I live, without which I cease to be … I am not free from [them] in any sense of my essential being … my spirit having no need of nature … On the contrary, in my whole being, in my creaturiness, I belong wholly to this world; it bears me, nurtures me, holds me.”

Humans are ordained by God to ensure creation profits and obtains well-being and enhanced life. So, from Genesis, we begin to see that though we are made in the image of God, we are created not over and against creation, but we are the shepherds of creation. And that means we are shepherds of one another. “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly” (1 Peter 5:2 esv).

As we exercise dominion over the created world, we do it knowing that we mirror God — made in His image. Our work is meant to serve God’s purposes more than our own, and this diverts us from becoming domineering. God created and equipped us to be stewards of His creation. “Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground” (Genesis 2:5 niv). God was not going to bring His creation to a close until He created people to work under Him to till the ground. God’s intent from the very beginning was that we would care for His creation. Again, that also means caring for one another. We are called to serve the best interests of all those who touch our lives: the Christ-followers in our lives, our employers, our customers, our colleagues and our coworkers — everyone.

We are called to exercise dominion as Jesus did. In the life of Jesus, dominion was self-emptying (Philippians 2:6-11). Jesus’ notion of dominion is a radical new perspective in which lordship means servanthood, quelling the thought of equality with God. The one who rules serves (Mark 10:43-44). Those who think they have a right to have their needs met first are called to take their place at the end of the line (Matthew 20:16). The role of the shepherd is not to control the sheep but to lay down his life for the sheep (John 10:11).¹

God as First Giver

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”

Malachi 3:10 NIV

A gift opens the way and ushers the giver into the presence of the great.

Proverbs 18:16 NIV

The Old Testament understanding of giving and generosity begins with the First Giver.

God gives first because that is what love does, and God is Love.

God is the Creator and Author of life. God enters freely into relationships with His creatures. And because God made us in His image, we too are givers. We have an intrinsic need to give. Thus, God’s people are most like God when they give.

Foundational to God as First Giver are the following:

- God created the earth and gave it to us to manage (Genesis 1-2).
- God created man and woman in His image and gave them life (Genesis 1:26-28, 2:7, 22).
- God led Israel out of the wilderness and gave them the Promised Land (Exodus 14).
- God gave the Law as a gift to His people (Exodus 19-24).
- God gave His only Son to suffer death on a cross (John 3:16).
- Jesus Christ gave His life for the salvation of the world (Mark 10:45; Titus 2:13-14).

So, as we are made in the image of God who is a giver, who is generous, we, too, are created to give and be generous.

Old Testament Understanding of Tithing

In the Old Testament, the words steward and stewardship are not mentioned. However, tithing was a common practice. In ancient Israel there were actually two or three tithes. The first tithe, maaser rishon, means the first tenth.

According to the Holiness Code in Leviticus 7, a tithe was given to the priests and their households for the maintenance of the sanctuary and its personnel.

In the Deuteronomic Code, every year the Hebrews paid a second tithe. This tithe, called maaser sheni, was taken from the produce remaining from the first tithe, maaser rishon — in other words, a tithe from a tithe. This tithe was a firstfruits offering used only in Jerusalem for social purposes — feasts, festivals and sacrifices — which were signs of glorifying God (Deuteronomy 14:22-27).

The tithes of the Holiness and Deuteronomic codes were later combined in the Hebrew canon as a double obligation. Then, in addition, every third and sixth year of the seven-year sabbatical cycle...
was designated the Year of the Tithe, also called the The Welfare Tithe (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). The three tithes together came to a total payment of 23½ percent of agricultural produce. This does not include taxation. 2

For most of history, the tithe was more like a tax, not a voluntary offering as it is in America today. At the time Jesus was born, the religious tithe combined with Roman taxes was almost 40 percent of income, both crops and money. We are not sure if Jesus tithed. The only time Jesus mentioned tithing was when He called the Pharisees hypocrites. He accused them of paying a tithe in mint, dill and cumin but neglecting the weightier demands of the law, justice, mercy and good faith (Matthew 23:23).

Conclusion

In the Old Testament, we learn that God is Owner of everything. We also learn that material blessings point beyond themselves to their Creator. Material blessings served the larger purpose of witness — whether it be the tithe (Deuteronomy 14:22-26), harvest, cattle (Psalm 50:10), animals for sacrifice, or the gift of the promised land (Leviticus 25:23). Israel did not own these gifts; God did. The gifts God placed in the hands of the Israelites as stewards and managers were to be used in worship as a sacrifice and were also used to sustain the well-being of God's people as they moved the mission of God forward.

In his book “Giving to God,” Mark Allen Powell brings up a good point: “In ancient Israel, before the temple, the community would gather around a rudimentary altar and each person would bring an offering. Drink offerings were poured out on the altar until the liquid was gone. Others brought grain offerings, sheaves of wheat that they would place on the altar, and light a fire.” 3

Powell continues, “What is the point? The basic point seems to be this: worshipers brought things they valued to the altar and left them there. People gave things to God, and those offerings were simply destroyed. It would be the equivalent today of receiving all the checks and currency in an offering plate, a match is tossed, and it all goes up in flames.”

For Israel, it was not what happened to the grain after it was placed on the altar; the point was simply putting the grain on the altar in the first place. 4 So often, we give to God with many personal preferences on the usage of what we're giving that the gift becomes more about us and less about God.

A New Testament Understanding of Giving and Generosity

In his explanation to the first article of the Apostles’ Creed, Martin Luther wrote in the Small Catechism about all the blessings that God has given to us, and the appropriate response:

“I believe that God has created me and all that exists, that He has given me and still preserves my body and soul, my eyes and ears, my reason and all my senses, together with food and clothing, home and family, and all my property. Every day He provides abundantly for all the needs of my life. He protects me from all danger and guards and keeps me from every evil. He does this purely out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore, I ought to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him. This is most certainly true.”

Jesus as Giver

The New Testament understanding of giving and generosity mirrors the Old Testament — Jesus is both giver and receiver. In Philippians 2:7, Paul tells us that Jesus emptied Himself and pours Himself into humanity. He emptied Himself until there was nothing left. Rather than saving His life and living for His own self-interests, Jesus spent His life down. He who was filled with divinity and the Father’s glory before the world began became a servant, a slave. Jesus left eternity and became like man that He might reach man and bring the message of salvation to all people.

In this self-emptying, we hear the echo of Jesus’ very challenging words:

• “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25 esv).

• If we want to be first, we must let everyone else go ahead of us. “So the last will be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16 esv).

• If we want to be truly free, we must submit to slavery. “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matthew 20:26-27 niv).

• If we want to be great, we must strive to make everyone else greater than ourselves. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3 niv; see also Luke 9:48).

Why are these words so challenging to us? Living a life of generosity is especially difficult because even though we may be more than willing to intellectually acknowledge God owns everything, on a daily basis we do not functionally live
Consider the following three questions. Choose which one you should be asking in regards to money and possessions.

- What do I want to do with my money and possessions?
- What do I want to do with God's money and possessions?
- What does God want me to do with His money and possessions?

Each of these questions represents a different attitude toward money and things.

Where are you? At some point in our spiritual walk, we shift our thinking about money and possessions and begin to see them all as gifts from God. We begin to see ourselves as managers of a trust God has given us. Through Baptism, we are given this role and assignment: to manage, with help from the Holy Spirit, all that God has entrusted to us in this life and the life of His Church.

According to Philippians 2, the Son left the pristine setting of a shared love that flowed among the Father, Son and Spirit and made Himself of no reputation as a human being — even a servant. While on earth, Jesus divested Himself of His divine rights and was the recipient of the Father's love, life and power — just as He had known them in eternity.

There is no greater example of generosity than this. This is the mystery of a love so great that although we may never fully grasp it, we can stand in awe and amazement and allow it to change us.

Generosity and giving are then spending down one's resources, time, energy, talents, treasure and witness for the sake of spreading the Good News to others who need to hear God's gracious gift of salvation — that none shall perish. If our giving is not a sacrifice, then we are probably not giving enough.

When we place our "gift" on the offering plate, we are not giving God anything. We are giving God but God's own! We are merely giving God whatever He has already given us. "Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:17-18 NRSV).

Everything belongs to God. Our lives, every idea or thought we have, our creativity, ingenuity, intellect, money, all possessions, and, yes, our faith are all given to us by God. And why does God give us these gifts? We are given these gifts because He loves us. And love gives. We are given these gifts to use, enjoy and build God's kingdom.

Leonard Sweet quotes a portion of a sermon by John Buchanan titled “Give It All”: “I always had a dream that when I am asked to give an accounting of my life to a higher court, it will be like this: ‘So, empty your pockets. What do you have left of your life? Any dreams that were unfulfilled? Any unusual talent that we gave you when you were born that you still have left? Any unsaid compliments or bits of love that you haven't spread around?’ And I will answer, ‘I've nothing to return. I spent everything you gave me. I'm as naked as the day I was born.’"\(^6\)

We see in John 3:16 the depth of God's generosity distilled in a single verse. This is a powerful text for Christian stewardship. Here again, we have the evidence of God as Giver. God created the world out of His divine love for us and all creation. He loved the world with such an intensity that He was willing to do anything to save it.

God held nothing back, sacrificing His own Son. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (ESV).

God first loved us and His creation. God first stooped down to His creation. He then gave the world a gift — His Son's life to pay the debt for our sin. Then God gives us the faith to accept the gift. And by faith we receive His gift of eternal life.

This is all grace.

- God gives the world.
- God gave us His Son.
- God gives us faith.
- God saves.
- God gives eternal life.

Giving and generosity are the visible sign of God's grace. Through Jesus, God initiates a new relationship — a new covenant with His creation — and reconciles the world to Himself. Powerful! God is first Giver.

**We Receive**

“Every day we stand in the shade of trees we did not plant. We live in houses we did not build. We eat food we did not produce. We ponder ideas that are not original to us. So, too, we live in a body and with a mind and a spirit that we did not choose.”

Donald W. Hinze\(^7\)

In a theology of receiving, the first question is not “How much do I give to God of what's mine?” Rather, it is “How much of God's do I keep for myself?” This question changes how we relate to our wealth and possessions. It implies that from the get-go, everything we
keep and everything we give away is His — we are only managers or trustees of God’s trust.

None of us leaves life without giving it all away — to someone or something. “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it” (1 Timothy 6:7 NIV). So, as we live this life, how much of what belongs to God will we keep for ourselves? How much will you and I give away in our lifetimes?

As Jesus sent the disciples out, He said to them, “Freely you have received; freely give” (Matthew 10:8 NIV). In other words, “You have received everything you need from me. You have the promise of salvation in your hearts — an abundance of grace and treasures set before you beyond measure. Now use these things to influence, to live as salt and light and flavor the lives of others with the Gospel.” Luke describes how what you give to others returns to you. “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38 NIV). We have freely received all that we need. We have enough.

However, we cannot give until we first have received. We cannot bless others until we first have received for ourselves God’s blessing. We cannot give witness to God until we receive God by faith. When we gather for worship, we receive the Good News through His Word. We receive Communion — the meal of forgiveness. We receive the joys of fellowship. Every day, we receive the gift of God’s forgiveness and are given new life.

Many people in the pews are better givers than receivers. Clergy, especially, suffer from this mindset. Many people feel awkward receiving gifts. Do you have a difficult time receiving? When you receive a gift or present, do you immediately think of ways that you can return the favor? Maybe it’s because you feel unworthy. Or maybe it is pride, or feeling obligated.

Jesus did say, “It’s better to give than receive,” and then He gave His life for us. The way stewardship is presented is often “Because Jesus died for you — you now owe God big time!” But wait: that is not God’s message. In that message, the Church gets stewardship only partly right, and thus terribly wrong.⁴

In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul informs us that the gift of salvation is God’s free gift to us. We receive it by faith — faith in God, the giver. We surely don’t deserve it, and we can’t earn it. It is outright a free gift. Although our flesh wants to earn and deserve this free gift and take the credit for being worthy of it, there is nothing we can do but receive it. Thus, it is an invitation rather than an obligation. Overwhelmed that God Himself would invite us to join Him, overjoyed by God’s grace and goodness — that He died for us and was raised for us — we are transformed into His image as Giver, and we too become generous.

Conclusion

“What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” ¹ Corinthians 4:7 RSV

Building a culture of generosity in your faith community begins with thinking clearly and more deeply about who God is in relation to us and all creation. In both the Old and New Testaments, we acknowledge God is Owner of everything. We see Jesus as Co-Creator and Owner. There is nothing we own or possess that we have not first received from God. Colossians declares Jesus’ work in creation: “For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16-17 NIV). Thus, time and creation live inside Christ alone. Nothing is outside Christ — nothing. Everything has its origin in Jesus.

So, when the love of Christ penetrates the human heart, it rebounds back to God in the form of generosity. As we are transformed in our generosity, we move from viewing giving as an obligation to viewing giving as a privilege. We recognize that everything God gives us flows through us. It is not ours; it never was ours. The gifts we receive are only on loan to us for a little while. Everything returns to God and is used to bring glory to Him — Jesus Christ.

6 Sweet, Leonard. Freely We Give, Freely We Receive (leonardsweet.com), Nov. 29, 2016.
7 Hinze, Donald W. To Give and Give Again: A Christian Imperative for Generosity (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press), 1990.
8 Lake Institute on Faith and Giving, Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising, Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, June 2019.
This section of RESET is designed to be completed in an all-day workshop or in three to five one-hour sessions over several weeks. Because this type of learning is highly interactive, you are encouraged to invite your entire congregation and/or mission district(s) to participate.

You will need:
1. A facilitator who convenes the larger group, watches time and provides a wrap-up. This can be a pastor, lay leader in stewardship or council member
2. Leaders to provide guidance in each small group
3. A printout of the RESET study for each participant
4. Flip charts or white boards and markers
5. Bibles

RESET focuses on interactive learning through small-group engagement within both small- and large-group settings. Form small groups of no more than four participants. In small groups, we learn from each other, and the Holy Spirit works best in community where assumptions can be challenged and tested. This helps to build confidence and courage in talking about stewardship, money, possessions and faith — the freedom of living generously in Jesus. Small groups allow participants to learn from each other and also foster greater transparency, helping to break through the taboos around the topics of money and finances.

Following some of the small-group breakout sections, the small groups then share within the larger group. To save time, each small group can select a spokesperson to contribute in the larger group.

Note to Facilitators
The sections of this study are not symmetrical. Whether the goal is to finish in a day with a series of breaks at set times, or to spread it over several weeks with a limited time per meeting, simply continue to work through the material as time permits, and pick up in the next session where the previous session left off.
1. What is Generosity?

**LARGE-GROUP EXERCISE**
The facilitator reads Mark 12:41-44 to the large group. During the reading, underline a word or phrase that speaks to generosity.

**The Widow’s Offering**

**Mark 12:41-44**

And He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And He called His disciples to Him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

**LARGE-GROUP DISCUSSION**

How does Mark 12:41-44 help you define generosity?

**How Do You Define Generosity?**

**SMALL-GROUP EXERCISE**

Use the space at right to record a time when someone was radically generous to you. What was your reaction? How did this person impact you? What did you take away from it?

**SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION**

Share your story. Compile some common characteristics from each story that describe the generous people and acts.

**LARGE-GROUP DISCUSSION**


**LARGE-GROUP EXERCISE**

Write responses on flip charts or a white board.

---

**What is Your Biblical Vision of Generosity?**

**SMALL-GROUP EXERCISE**

What are the biblical beliefs and values that shape your understanding of money, possessions, giving and stewardship campaigns? Note some key points in the space at right. Refer to Section I of RESET and your Bible.

**SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION**

Share your responses, formulate a summary and designate a speaker for the large-group discussion.

**LARGE-GROUP DISCUSSION**

Facilitator asks each group for its summary.

**Definition of Generosity**

Generosity is a lifestyle in which, as a demonstration of God’s love and grace, we share all that we have and all that we are or ever will become. It involves both attitude and action and enhances the well-being of the receiver. Generosity flows from hearts that have been transformed as they conform their lives to Jesus Christ, who is generous. The Holy Spirit activates giving in such a way that the giver overflows with joy as they give liberally and abundantly of their time, talents, treasure and witness to the mission of Jesus Christ.

**LARGE-GROUP EXERCISE**

Name some challenges your congregation faces in becoming a truly generous congregation. Write responses on flip charts or a white board. If the discussion stagnates, use this list as a place to start.

- Lack of shared vision
- “Giving to get” attitude
- The power and influence of money
- Lack of a biblical vision
- Lack of communication
- Failure to celebrate incremental change
- Risk aversion vs. opportunity
- Self-preservation vs. emptying oneself for mission
The Big Picture: 
Pyramid of Giving

LARGE-GROUP DISCUSSION

Looking at the diagram “Pyramid of Giving,” consider and discuss the following questions.

Where do you think you and your congregation are in relation to these percentages?

What does your pattern of giving in your congregation say about your financial health?

How does this depiction of giving delineation reset your vision of stewardship in your congregation?

Vision Beyond the Congregation

Giving and generosity have a ripple effect. This effect begins in the heart of every believer and extends into the congregation, then it flows out from each congregation to support the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) mission. That then flows out locally, nationally and globally.

Each NALC congregation is encouraged to give 5 percent to 7 percent of its annual income to the NALC mission. These monies go to support staff and travel, mission starts, and domestic and global missions. The NALC counts on this percentage of support in order to fund its mission and ministry. As of 2020, 25 percent of NALC congregations give no support to the NALC mission.

As we embrace the Great Commission and the call to build disciple-making cultures throughout our NALC congregations, let us not forget this: it takes all sorts of resources; spiritual gifts, human resources and the financial capacity to carry out this commissioning.

SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

Together, look at the charts at right. How big is your congregation’s vision of giving?

SMALL-GROUP EXERCISE

What steps might your congregation consider in implementing a bigger vision of giving?
LARGE-GROUP EXERCISE
The facilitator reads Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-34 to the large group. During the reading, consider what was happening in this early Christian community.

The Fellowship of the Believers
Acts 2:42-47 esv
And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

They Had Everything in Common
Acts 4:32-35 esv
Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION
The earliest description of the newly formed Christian community includes a reference to the sharing of possessions. One of the key marks of new activity of the Holy Spirit was the willingness to share possessions. This radical generosity was a natural response to the apostles’ teaching, worship and prayer, and the warmth of genuine relationships — all this was activated by the Holy Spirit. Members sold their land. Others sold their houses. All who were in need had provision. Beneath all this giving was a deep sense of joy — a joy that was infectious. This self-giving and sacrifice did not come from an attitude of “this is mine” and “that is yours.” It did not come from hearts turned in on themselves, but rather from hearts wide open and attentive to the needs of others — a true sacrifice.

How was generosity being expressed in these early Christian communities? Faith? Gratitude? Relational generosity? Trust? Witness?

If your congregation was in need — or in a larger sense, if the NALC was in need — what would you be willing to give up for the sake of Christ’s Church?

SMALL-GROUP EXERCISE
How might we learn from their example in our own communities?
SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION
Changing the culture of giving in your congregation requires first being aware of the obstacles. The way to do this is to step back, to figuratively get on the balcony to look at the big picture of giving and generosity in your congregation.

How is generosity being expressed in the community? Do your pastor and leadership support faithful stewardship practices? Here are a few obstacles that many congregations face:

- Individuals lack biblical knowledge about giving.
- The language used when asking for money scolds instead of inspires.
- The congregation or pastor harbors theological ambivalence about money.
- Pastors and lay leaders have not received the training they need to feel confident.
- Either implicitly or explicitly, the congregation culture places stewardship responsibility solely with the pastor.
- People feel apologetic and uneasy asking for money.
- Money is a conflictual topic because of a lack of transparency and trust.
- People fear rejection and failure.
- People believe fundraising is manipulation.

INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE
Write down the current barriers that prevent you and your congregation from living generously.

What do you think needs to be implemented to overcome these barriers?

SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION
Lift up and give thanks for the many ways your congregation is being generous. Choose one way to share with the large group, and designate a speaker for the large-group discussion.

LARGE-GROUP DISCUSSION
Facilitator asks each group to share a way the congregation is being generous.

LARGE-GROUP EXERCISE
Draw out common threads. Write responses on flip charts or a white board.

Importance of a Shared Vocabulary
To change the culture of giving in your congregation, a shared vocabulary is a necessity. This language that is repeated over and over again in the congregation by the pastor, stewardship team and leaders describes your vision, biblical beliefs, values and mission regarding giving and generosity.

Words have power. Words inspire and empower if used properly. Over time, your shared language will begin to take root and reshape the culture of giving and generosity in your congregation.

Many congregations only talk about giving and ask for money during stewardship campaigns or when there is a crisis. This is a great disservice. Changing the culture of giving means speaking the language of generosity everywhere, all year long — from the pulpit, during mission moments, at council meetings, as part of Bible studies, and on websites. Generosity falls into four categories — time, talent, treasure and testimony. It’s not just money, so the shared vocabulary must include all categories.
The Paradigm Shift in Religious Giving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Traditional Paradigm</th>
<th>The Emerging Paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral obligation</td>
<td>Cultivate giving in the giver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duty</td>
<td>Grace/delight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution-centered</td>
<td>Giver-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions are to be trusted</td>
<td>Institutions must earn trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions are autonomous</td>
<td>Givers are collaborative partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising is raising money</td>
<td>Fundraising is nurturing generosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving is contribution</td>
<td>Giving is creating change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgets are need-driven</td>
<td>Giving is value-driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial focus is insular</td>
<td>Financial focus is global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income sources are limited</td>
<td>Income sources are diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different from business</td>
<td>Embrace business principles and practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wherever you are in the paradigm shift, there is a lot of faithful giving on both sides of the paradigm. Both should be celebrated!

**SMALL-GROUP EXERCISE**
Share your thoughts on the chart “The Paradigm Shift in Religious Giving.” Where are you in your personal life? Where is your congregation? Are you mostly “Traditionalist” or “Emerging”? Why?

3. Engaging Others and Nurturing Relationships

**It’s All About Relationships: Loving Jesus and Loving People!**

There’s a reason Jesus said the second-greatest commandment is like the first: If we love God with all our heart, we will love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). It functions like faith and works; if we truly have the first, the second naturally follows. If God is not the love of our life, there is no way we will truly love our neighbors as ourselves, for we will love ourselves supremely. The most loving thing we can do for others is to love God more than we love them. If we love God most, we will love others best. Faithful stewardship begins with God’s love for us and our love for God, and, out of that mutual love, produces a love for others. And love produces generosity. Many of us have come to associate stewardship with money and being asked to give money once a year so our congregations can pay the bills. But one important truth must be emphasized: Stewardship is all about nurturing loving relationships!

Often, people quit giving or lack inspiration to serve with their time and talents because of a lack of connection. When we feel connected to our faith communities, when we feel included and cared for, then we have a need to give. Building a culture of generosity in a faith community begins with cultivating a genuine love for people. This love is not about trying to get money from them; this love is about seeing people as individuals who are worthy of love. We love people with
the Gospel. Stewardship is all about nurturing people and providing pastoral care. This type of care is not just the pastor's responsibility. It is everyone's responsibility.

If we look at what Jesus did in His ministry, we see that He engaged people. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John record more than 40 instances of Jesus meeting with individuals. Among the people we learn about in the Gospels are the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-26), the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-23), the paralytic (John 5:1-15), the adulterous woman (John 8:1-11), Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31), and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10).

Jesus went out of His way to connect with people. He allowed Himself to be interrupted if it meant connecting with someone. Jesus initiated conversations and asked penetrating questions that showed His interest and concern. He was concerned about people's physical and emotional health, but He was especially concerned about the spiritual conditions of their hearts. Jesus listened well. Rather than judge a person and turn a cold shoulder, He pursued them. He had the unique ability to draw people out of their separateness, isolation, and sin and to Himself.

Jesus engaged people not in religious settings so much as He engaged them where they worked and where they lived. Do we engage with others only in the church, only on our turf, or do we move out into the world where people work and live out the daily routines of life?

**LARGE-GROUP EXERCISE**
The facilitator reads John 4:7-26 to the large group. During the reading, try to envision yourself as the person coming to the well to draw water and being approached by Jesus.

**Jesus and the Woman of Samaria**

**John 4:7-26 ESV**

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to Him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” The woman said to Him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.” Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” The woman answered Him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”
**SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION**

Jesus asked the woman for water and she expressed surprise that a Jew would talk to a Samaritan. It was culturally unacceptable for a man to speak with a woman privately (in verse 27, when the disciples return, they are surprised to see Him talking to her). Jesus, however, cares for people more than He cares for cultural, political and religious divides. Above all else, He was concerned for the woman’s soul; and He desired to give her Living Water.

How did Jesus connect with the Samaritan woman, and what happened in the exchange?

- Jesus initiated the conversation.
- He crossed the safe and accepted cultural boundaries to speak the truth to her.
- He connected with her, redeeming the integrity of her personhood.
- He didn’t see her as others did — as an outcast, a sinner filled with shame and guilt.
- Jesus saw her as the image-bearer He created her to be.

Sometimes to grow in relationship with others, we must initiate fruitful, truthful conversations with them — not for the sole purpose of procuring more money or acts of service, but for their spiritual care. Conversations about money and personal finances are topics that many people prefer to keep private. However, if someone’s giving is down, or if someone has stopped giving altogether and is no longer serving in ministry, it is our responsibility as caring fellow Christians to initiate a conversation with them. Rather than turning a blind eye to the change in their behavior, it is an opportunity for us to offer care and assistance. It is the most loving thing a Christian can do. Like Jesus, who crossed many boundaries to reach the Samaritan woman, we too may need to cross boundaries and open conversations on issues that may be sensitive when the opportunity arises.

**SMALL-GROUP EXERCISE**

As you look at generosity and giving in your congregation, what is the quality of your relationships? How do these relationships impact giving?

Consider these relationships:

- Relationship between giver and God
- Relationships between giver in the congregation and leadership in the congregation
- Relationship between you, no matter your role, and the members you’re asking to give
- Relationship between giver and the NALC

People quit giving because of lack of connection. Giving declines when trust declines. Who in your congregation or your ministry needs an invitation to lunch or a home visit?  

---

**Knowing Who Gives What**

There are two different positions on giving records in the congregation; some say it’s vital that pastors have access to records, while others are very much opposed. If a congregation chooses to make a change, it may be challenging to do so. When a pastor does not have this information, he or she is left on the outside of a key triangle in church life. Being outside the triangle leaves the pastor in the dark on the revenue stream, creates anxiety, and can tempt others to use financial matters to control ministry. At stake are not only financial issues but, more importantly, spiritual issues. Knowing the giving patterns allows the pastor to provide spiritual care and shape his or her teaching and preaching in the congregation.

Although for many people money and giving are taboo topics, they are a window into the faith life of congregation members. Giving and generosity are barometers or indicators as to what is happening in the spiritual lives of members — hardship, loss, grief or conflict. Pastors should not be timid about speaking with parishioners about money matters.
Knowing your own history with money is important to understanding how you respond today with your finances and giving. Generosity is passed on to us, and we learn to be generous when others model it. Also, knowing your congregation members’ history with money helps you to navigate financial issues and institute new guidelines that prompt new behaviors.

Explore your financial past. The past is always present. Margaret Bendroth writes, “I do believe the past plays an important, often an unarticulated role in creating the present-day realities of religious institutions. Memories survive in different ways, sometimes as deep undercurrent of sadness, disappointment, sometimes suspicion to outsiders or a resentment to authority. The past can work in positive ways too … all of this helps to understand the DNA of a place and its people.”

We all need to explore our contributions to challenges around money at church. The way we react to financial matters at church is rooted in our experience in the families we grew up in.

**Pastors Don’t Get a Free Pass from Family History**

It is important to remember that pastors are people and themselves congregation members. Answering the call and holding the office do not erase family or financial history any more than for any other person. For pastors, writes Bendroth, “To the extent that the pastor has not resolved issues about money related to his or her family of origin, the pastor will never be able to resolve issues about money in his or her congregation.”

**LARGE-GROUP EXERCISE**

Among the large group, find someone you don’t know or don’t know very well. As partners, answer a question presented by the facilitator. After three minutes, the facilitator will prompt people to change partners for a new question.

- When you were a child, how did your parents discuss money issues and manage them in your family/household?
- Describe a time when someone

---

Our relationships and our faith practices influence generosity in others.

**Who influences others to be generous?**

- 89% Parents
- 63% Grandparents
- 56% Close Friends
- 47% Peers
gave you a gift that was over-the-top generous. Why did it leave such a positive impression?

- In your family of origin, how was generosity modeled?
- Describe a time when you were extremely generous to a friend or family member. Why were you moved to give such a gift? How did the giving change you?

**LARGE-GROUP DISCUSSION**

After all four questions have been asked and answered, talk about what you learned or realized about your family of origin and how it influenced your attitude and habits regarding money.

**Spiritual Autobiography**

In his book *Living in Praise: Worshiping and Knowing God*, Anglican theologian David Ford calls “coping with God and God's generosity…the central task of the Christian faith.” Giving generously is a calling. It is also a spiritual practice. How we cope with and manage the wealth and manifold gifts God has blessed us with are both a joy and a struggle. We love God, and we love/need money — yet we know we shouldn’t. Therein lie the bondage and the battle.

Jesus understood how our love and need for money would distract us from serving Him and compete with our loyalties and priorities. One of the most powerful examples of this was when Jesus engaged the young, rich ruler on the question of salvation (Matthew 19:16-22).

As we relate to money and possessions, each of us has been influenced by biblical teachings, our parents and grandparents, our peers, our vocations and our life experiences. Some people have a great deal of anxiety and fear about money running out. Others never worry and find themselves in frequent financial trouble. Adding to the conflict is the fact that money is an off-limits topic for many of us. Regardless of what we have or don’t have in the bank or retirement plan, regardless of the debt we may carry, regardless of our individual financial hardships — we aim to keep money matters private.

However, the more we open up and tell our personal stories, the more we become aware of financial matters’ impact on our faith and life. Each of us needs to do our own inner work on money so we don’t project our anxieties, fears and lived experiences on our congregation’s mission and vision of giving, spending, saving, borrowing or lending.

**INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE**

Write a spiritual autobiography of how your family of origin and faith life shaped your attitude and behaviors with money. Was abundance or scarcity expressed? Was it safe to talk about money, or did it produce anxiety? How did faith inform one’s charitable giving? How does your history inform your present attitudes and behaviors with money — marriage, household finances and congregational giving?

While writing, consider these questions:

- How has Jesus blessed your life and influenced your giving?
- What has been your response to these many blessings? (Generosity? Increased faith? Grace?)
- How have you used your wealth and resources for God’s mission and ministry in His Church?
- What growth markers are present that show how you’ve grown spiritually in your giving?
- If nothing was holding you back, how might you use your financial resources, time and talents to further God’s mission on earth?
**Visioning**

Here’s some good news: You can learn to make new choices. If you were going to start tomorrow with what you’ve discovered so far, what would your new vision for giving look like?

To synthesize means to undergo a change, to bring together or combine separate parts to make a whole. Often when we learn, we compartmentalize and don’t apply new information to existing knowledge.

With your biblical knowledge and the other sections in this study, you can write both a personal vision and a congregational vision for generosity and giving.

Additional space for composing visions is in the appendix of this study. Turn to page 24.

**INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE**

Prayerfully formulate a personal vision for generosity and giving. Be specific. What is your vision for your own personal stewardship?

**SMALL-GROUP EXERCISE**

Prayerfully formulate a vision for giving/generosity in your congregation. What would you like to see? What are the joys, challenges and hopes of the vision? Designate a speaker for the large-group discussion.

**LARGE-GROUP DISCUSSION**

Facilitator asks each group to share a joy, challenge or hope of their vision.

**LARGE-GROUP EXERCISE**

What do the joys, challenges and hopes have in common? Write responses on flip charts or a white board.

---

**5. Transformation**

When giving moves from being a purely transactional activity to a transformational one, then we notice the beauty and goodness of the grace around us. Biblical stewardship is not only securing gifts through transactions. Rather, it is about spiritual transformation — helping people become rich toward God.

Transformational giving is not focused on the amount or size of the gift but on the joy and life-changing effect it has on the giver.
SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION
Review and discuss the diagram “Two Congregational Typologies.” Which type describes your congregation’s approach to fundraising? Explain.

Moving from obligation to privilege is a mark of discipleship. As we grow in faith, we also grow in generosity. Giving begets giving.

In the transactional typology, the mindset of the congregation is shaped by giving as only obligation and duty. The underlying fear is that there is never enough: not enough money, participation, ministry, leadership. There is a sense of scarcity — hanging on tightly to finances and allowing that fear to completely control the ministry. The fear produces anxiety in the congregational system, and it penetrates throughout the leadership and the community.

The transformational type sees the congregation’s life in terms of God’s abundant grace. The ability of a congregation to grasp the vision has an overwhelming effect on how the congregation approaches giving. There is the feeling among members that there is enough and they are blessed. Anxiety and fear are replaced with hope and joy about the future.

SMALL-GROUP EXERCISE
If your congregation is a “pay the bills” type, what steps could be taken to move to being a “share the vision” type? Designate a speaker for the large-group discussion.

LARGE-GROUP DISCUSSION
Facilitator asks each group to share its evaluation of the congregation’s type and, if it is “pay the bills,” requests the group’s suggestions to move to being a “share the vision” type.

LARGE-GROUP EXERCISE
What steps are most frequently suggested? Which suggestions are unique and creative? Write responses on flip charts or a white board.

1 Marcuson, Margaret J. Money and Ministry (Portland, Oregon: Marcuson Leadership Circle), 2014.
SECTION III

Faith and Giving Commitment Sunday

Outline of the Process

Creating an annual Faith and Giving Commitment Sunday (FGCS) is an opportunity to provide a Spirit-filled time where generosity is nurtured and giving grows. It is also a time for those who have gifts within the Body of Christ to use them. By bringing everyone’s giftedness together, collaborating and working for the good of the whole, congregations can produce a spiritually impactful experience for all involved.

It takes all kinds of spiritual gifts, talents and natural abilities within the body of Christ to create, manage and implement a FGCS. You can use those who are artistic to design banners, graphics for flyers and announcements. Those who communicate well can write your correspondence and be your communicators. Musicians and people who love music can design a special Commitment Sunday worship service and even compose a theme-based hymn. This is also a wonderful opportunity to get your youth involved and allow them input on the team. And those who have the gift of hospitality can plan and prepare a celebration luncheon.

Nurturing generosity in your congregation is about inviting members to participate, to use their gifts and all their resources to enhance and take part in God’s mission.

As you embark on this journey, it is wise to not hurry the process. Planning and preparing should begin eight weeks before Faith and Giving Commitment Sunday. Each week, the process builds upon previous weeks through worship, intentional prayer time, study and fellowship. This allows the Holy Spirit to move and stir the hearts of God’s people to produce an overwhelming act of generosity for the Kingdom.

Method and Timeline

This section refers to the study “Stewards of God’s Influence.” This resource is available at thenalc.org/stewardship. The timeline begins at Week 8, with Faith and Giving Commitment Sunday as Week 1.

WEEKS 8 AND 7 BEFORE FAITH AND GIVING COMMITMENT SUNDAY

This includes the following:

1. The Faith and Giving Commitment Sunday (FGCS) Team: Your FGCS Team is formed and a chair is selected. The team should include the pastor, stewardship chair, finance secretary, council president, council secretary and others in the congregation. No matter who is selected to join the team, please confirm they have both a passion for and firm commitment to this type of ministry.

2. Prayer Team: A prayer chair is chosen, and this person will select two or three more people who are passionate about prayer. This team will pray for the congregation’s FGCS process and also distribute...
3. **Missional Theme:** As part of the pastor’s vital role in leading your fundraising efforts, the pastor will develop a biblical theme from Scripture and share it with the FGCS Team and the Prayer Team, and together they will craft a missional theme.

4. **Council Goodwill Ambassadors:** The FGCS Team will present the missional theme to the council and discuss in depth how the leadership will move the mission forward. It is important for the entire council to be on board with this and support the FGCS Team’s efforts as goodwill ambassadors. Those on the team will ask each team member and council member to also grow in their generosity. It is truly difficult to lead others in their giving when you are not.

5. **Worship:** The pastor will share the theme with staff and work with worship leaders to prepare the special FGCS service.

6. **Mission Moments:** The pastor and FGCS Team will select three members to give Sunday testimony and give witness to God’s generosity in their recent faith lives. These could be families, adults, youths or staff members. The intent is to give an account — to tell a story of how God’s generosity and care provided for that person in some way. This is a faith story, nothing more or less.

7. **Teaching:** Planning should begin for the pastor to provide a three-week Bible study prior to FGCS. It is important that members hear the Word in order that the Holy Spirit may move in the hearts of the people. Use RESET or develop a study of your own around your theme.

8. **Hospitality:** The FGCS Team will enlist coordinators to plan a celebration luncheon for FGCS.

---

**WEEK 6 BEFORE FGCS**

The Prayer Team will announce to the congregation the theme for the FGCS. The team will also ask the congregation to faithfully pray for the Holy Spirit to bless the work of the pastor and the FGCS Team and to move in the heart of each member of the congregation. The team will ask members to prayerfully consider what their giving to this year’s vision might look like.

- The FGCS Team will meet to continue planning.
- The Prayer Team will write and send an announcement letter. Use or review sample letters in “Stewards of God’s Influence,” beginning on Page 16. This resource is available at thenalc.org/stewardship.
- Prayer requests are added to the weekly Prayers of the Church.

**WEEK 5 BEFORE FGCS**

- The Prayer Team will send a prayer via email to the congregation.

**WEEK 4 BEFORE FGCS**

- The pastor will teach the first week of the Bible study.
- The FGCS Team will select a Counter Team consisting of the FGCS chair, the church financial secretary, and another officer or the pastor. The Counter Team will discuss how giving will be recorded on FGCS and have Estimate of Giving cards printed. Use or review the tools in “Stewards of God’s Influence,” beginning on Page 13, and the sample card on Page 19.
- The Prayer Team will send a prayer via email to the congregation.

**WEEK 3 BEFORE FGCS**

- The council president will send a letter to the congregation. This letter should highlight this year’s giving theme, be uplifting, encourage members to be in prayer as they reflect on Faith and Giving Commitment Sunday, and urge them to consider what they plan to give of their financial resources to support the church’s mission. Use or review the letter on Page 17 in “Stewards of God’s Influence.”
- The pastor will prepare and deliver the first of a three-part sermon series. RESET Section 1 could be used as a resource for this series.

- The first of three Mission Moments will be given.
- The pastor will teach the second week of the Bible study.
- The Prayer Team will send a prayer via email to the congregation.
- The hospitality coordinators will meet to plan the luncheon.

**WEEK 2 BEFORE FGCS**

- The pastor will send a letter encouraging prayer and prompting the congregation to grow in generosity as they consider what they will financially sacrifice of what God has already given them.
- The pastor will prepare and deliver the second of a three-part sermon series.
- The second of three Mission Moments will be given.
- The pastor will teach the third week of the Bible study.
- The Prayer Team will send a prayer via email to the congregation.
- The FGCS Team will follow up with worship leaders, the Counter Team, and the hospitality coordinators to ensure plans are in place for FGCS.

**WEEK 1: THE FINISH LINE**

Faith and Giving

Commitment Sunday

- The worship leaders will put into motion their plans for the service celebrating God’s abundance and generosity.
- The pastor will prepare and deliver the conclusion of the sermon series.
- The third of three Mission Moments will be given.
- The FGCS chair will address the congregation to explain, distribute, and collect the Estimate of Giving Cards. Use or review the suggestion on Page 13 in “Stewards of God’s Influence.”
- The Counter Team will record and tally the information on the Estimate of Giving Cards while the luncheon is being served, and the FGCS chair will announce the results during the lunch.
APPENDIX

A Portrait of Hope: A Legacy Letter to Loved Ones

As you reflect on RESET and what it means to live a life of generosity, you may be thinking about all the gifts you've accumulated in your life thus far — your faith, relationships, wealth and possessions. All these things that you highly value are interrelated, and you may be wondering how you pass all this on to the next generation.

“A Portrait of Hope” is a very personal document: it is about you and what you value most and hold in high esteem. It affords you the opportunity to reconcile what you have learned about yourself with philanthropic hopes and dreams. The goal is to help you develop a sense of mission for your giving that resonates with you as a person of faith, as a child of God.

One very good way to do this is to write a letter to one or more members of your family. It may be your spouse, children, grandchildren or a brother or sister. While you may never send this letter, it is an invaluable tool to help you have further faith conversations with your spouse or other family members, as a creator of wealth, to tell your story and share your vision and values. It is a way that patriarchs and matriarchs can pass along the family blessing. It allows children to own their heritage and feel a part of the philanthropic legacy bearing the family name.

Finally, “A Portrait of Hope” allows you to clarify your thoughts in such a way as to outline the next steps you want to take in leaving a legacy.

Writing this will get you to think about your giving strategically — to have a long-term plan in creating a legacy. Regardless of how you eventually use (or don’t use) your “Portrait of Hope,” it is a way for you to put clear thoughts down on paper, a way to prompt yourself to shape your vision of giving and generosity now and for generations to come. In addition, you may want to use this letter when preparing your trust or will, and perhaps place it with these documents to be read upon your death when you return to your heavenly home.

- Tell your story.
- Tell how God has influenced your life.
- Talk about your blessings and wounds.
- Describe what is precious to you.
- Describe your passions and your hopes.
- Reveal what you would change in the world if you had the money and the authority to do whatever you wanted to do.
- Discuss the legacy you would like to leave your family, church and community.
- Be candid about how you would like to be remembered.
- Outline ways you hope to use the possessions and wealth in the next five to ten years.
- Describe how you connect your deepest convictions about your life and faith with using the blessings God has given you to do something significant for humanity.

Philanthropy means love of humankind. The word is used in this case because philanthropy often influences charitable giving.
Visioning

A vision creates a detailed mental picture of the future that clearly glorifies God and His purposes for your life. A vision has impact and risks, produces hope and enthusiasm, and will outlast you. Use what you learned in Section I and Section II to help create a mental picture of how giving and generosity will be lived out — a personal vision you will live into, and a vision for building a culture of giving and generosity in your congregation. (This is part of the exercises on page 19.)

**My Personal Vision:**
The Freedom of Living Generously

**Our Congregation:**
The Freedom of Living Generously